

# 2030

... *WHERE ARE WE HEADED?*

In 1616 Eustache de Refuge wrote of the importance of purposefully steering through life.

*“Many good pilots have been lost at sea despite their knowledge and experience of navigation, whereas others less knowledgeable, with neither astrolabe nor compass, have successfully completed many a long and perilous voyage. But none of us conclude from this that we should simply throw ourselves on the mercy of the winds without skill, science or compass”.*



**This philosophy of doing all we can to get where we want to go, particularly through turbulent waters and buffeting winds, is as relevant today as it was then.**

The world of 2030, settling down after a decade of storms, is and is not as it was in January 2020. Following the on again off again peaks of the pandemic, COVID-19's grip finally loosened and nations across the world have now settled to a relatively stable new normal. The virus exposed old problems and pre-existing weaknesses in our societies, for example in healthcare, in social justice, and in national supply chains: we've lived through a syndemic, the synergistic epidemics of COVID-19 and rolling social equality upheavals. We've learned that you can't separate science from politics and need to balance risk.

Our horizons have narrowed, every community has moved to become more resilient, and we're generally all behaving differently. Each community has found its own balance between its biological and social needs.

## **SOCIETY**

The world is more balkanized than before, with universal free trade and travel being replaced by independentist national behaviors, as the self-sufficiency that was so startlingly absent during the pandemic is built into most government policies. This we see in the many measures to encourage local food production, the local manufacturing of medical equipment and pharmaceuticals, and generally to repatriate economically important activities. Technology is helping here, for example with 3D printing enabling low scale local manufacturing and electronic platforms enabling small economic units, similar to the old putting out system of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to be viable. Tourism has also become more localized as the cost and hassles of international travel have grown, even between countries with pre-agreed air bridges.

Public spaces have evolved to reflect our renewed sensitivity to personal health and safety. Municipalities have converted more streets into pedestrian malls, sidewalks and restaurant forecourts have been widened to permit social distancing, and more deliberate thought is given to

avoiding congregate settings. We expect public spaces to be safe and sanitized, “certified clean”, with contact free vending machines, elevators, parking payment, door opening etc.: and we don’t use cash much now. Even though several years have passed since the COVID-19 pandemic, we’re still wary of tight spaces and our shopping behaviors are now product-focused: we spend many fewer afternoons wandering through the stores at the mall. We feel a little strange, though comforted, when service workers like cabin crew and cleaners still wear hazmat uniforms.

Health systems have, in most places, been overhauled to head off the possibility that we could be caught out again by Disease X, the next pandemic. COVID-19 exposed the lack of stockpiles and the serious under-resourcing of most systems, the fatally poor treatment of the elderly in care homes, the devaluation of healthcare workers, and the inability to manage concerted national pandemic responses. But these advances have been patchy. Populations able to act as one (mainly liberal democracies with a cultural disposition to cohesion, or autocracies able to enforce it) have generally taken steps to improve national health services and social safety nets, whereas others less inclined to act for the greater good of the whole (liberal democracies with fierce individual autonomy values or autocracies with poor control over their populations) have continued to argue among themselves over the past ten years and have achieved little.

Demographics have played a role in accelerating change as the number of older people in Western countries continues to outpace the number of young people coming into the economy. This has led to more choice for the young, more opportunities for the old, and has required more flexibility from employers. Career paths have changed to be more individual-brand centric.

Each community is dealing with issues of social justice differently, generally reflecting its cultural history in its collective will: there is still a patchwork quilt of realities ranging from old-style racial and other prejudices to a broad embracing of plurality.

### ***ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE***

The greatest change in business behavior can be seen in the reduced demand for downtown office space. The combination of people having realized that working from home is both feasible and safe, the ongoing requirements of some social distancing, and the explosion of sophisticated electronic platforms for immersive team work, have conspired to relegate the office as an essential central gathering place to the past, to the same corner of history to which we consigned the coaching inns. Many of us don’t want the inconvenience of commuting to and from a shared enclosed space, equipping ourselves with masks and sanitizers, queuing and keeping our distance when travelling, and interacting with the testing robots: even less since we then find that interaction in an office that’s at 50%-75% occupancy compared to a decade ago is not what it was. All this, and the fact that organizations have been able to save substantial costs by switching to largely distant working has probably done away with the old notion of “the office” for good.

Despite a progressive relaxation of the rules over the past few years, another big change has been the substantial reduction in business travel, even for those with essential traveler, healthy traveler, or prescreened traveler registrations. The hassles of flying, the remaining quarantines on arrival, and the greater complications of ground transportation have combined with higher ticket prices to reduce business travel. This is not universal, but the exceptional development of electronic

platforms for immersive virtual meetings is providing a high-clean low-touch substitute: day trips to New York for a meeting have all but disappeared and there is no fast travel..

Paradoxically, in this physically distant but socially close world, organizations have become more not less international in their reach. Social norms no longer oblige us to meet business contacts face to face in potentially unhygienic enclosed spaces. This is leading to an internationalization of social and business relationships as physical proximity is perceived to be less and less necessary.

Organizational life is increasingly being lived virtually and at a distance, though this dose vary from place to place and a few high-density offices have returned. Those of us who have been in the workplace for decades have acquired new skills and attitudes, and younger people coming into organizations now expect the deployment of the latest communications technologies and a world where they can enjoy an optimum balance between career and home life.

### **INDIVIDUALS**

Perhaps the biggest change has been our attitude to living, working, and going to school in urban centers. One of the sad lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic was that when people are crowded together viruses spread far more effectively than when there are greater degrees of separation: our default now is distance. We live in a world where most of us are not expected to go to work at a physical place on a regular basis, and we can put the personal travel time saved to good use.

Much of our education is now taking place on learning platforms at a distance. There's been a shakeout in secondary and university institutions as social distancing plus student avoidance of crowded spaces have delocalized demand in favor of on-line schooling with big brand institutions such as McGill and Harvard. Our healthcare also comes to us largely through telemedicine, as we limit our visits to surgeries and hospitals to diagnostics and surgical interventions.

The kind of place most of us want to live is close to amenities and schools but not in a city center high-rise for a high-density lifestyle. Our preferred home is in the suburbs or in the country, has some green space around it and has a fully functional office room for us to work in, often one of the new work-loft residential conversions. Broadband is now universally available. Our business dress codes remain smart but have become more casual, we buy stay-at-home clothes and make up, and high-end designer masks have largely replaced ties. We are more autonomous when it comes to energy, often with our own or local microgrid providing our electricity. We'll go out to a the good restaurant or bar, but the experience is different to what it was in January 2020: we're often eating at home and giving small dinner parties, using one of the total-catering services that fits our taste and budget.

We're very conscious of cleanliness and health these days, making sure that when Disease X arrives to succeed COVID-19 we're better prepared. We pay more deliberate attention to making life less dangerous, to social distancing and protective measures and to our physical and mental health. We typically cycle or walk rather than driving, and we subscribe to one of the health-passport services to prove our wellness to ourselves and others. We deploy a variety of sterilizers and HEPA filters and are more conscious of the quality of the air we breathe. We vacation close to home because of the cost and hassle of international travel, and we buy our food, products and services locally using

one of the purpose-built electronic platforms. Our teenagers are leery of sleepovers and our lifestyle is low touch.

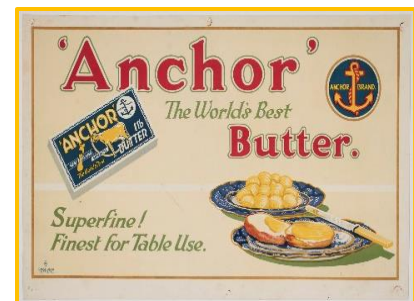
We're now much closer to accepting the need to reduce carbon emissions, particularly as this is facilitated by new technologies and the creation of a multitude of new business opportunities as electricity substitutes for other energy sources: and cleaner air is easier to breathe. Similarly, we are more sensitive to maintaining healthy animal ecosystems to reduce the pathogens produced by intensive animal farming and to reduce the overuse of antibiotics.

### **CONCLUSION**

The turbulence of the past decade has brought several realities into focus and has generally reinforced people's commitment to fashion a safer and more welcoming world. There have been several cultural shifts, many now imperceptible, in how we live and see the world. Our mental attitudes have changed, and the interdependency of economic and physical health has led to an adjustment in career life balance for many of us.

Some of us remember why we behave the way we do now, some of us have forgotten, and most people under the age of 15 never knew. Many of the things we do represent newly learned behaviors: more handwashing, more masks, fewer handshakes, avoiding proximity with strangers. We have learned these through a largely unnoticed balancing of risk and reward over the past decade, and now in 2030 we have already forgotten where many of these came from.

**My sister will forgive me for remembering the day, a good 20 years ago, when we were trying to remember why she always kept the used greaseproof wrappers from the blocks of butter she bought at the store. When I couldn't help her, she called our mother who reminded us that this was to have butter to grease the pan for cooking since, during the second world war, butter was scarce and rationed. A behavior that we had learned but whose purpose had, for us, become lost in time.**



#### **Authors note.**

*If discretion is the better part of valor, then I am indiscrete. Imagining our world some 500 weeks from now, given the many imponderables, is hard. But I think the exercise is worthwhile, if only to stimulate a few thoughts for us to mull over: we need to base our plans on something. So this is a view from a Canadian perspective and principally of the western world, that I hope may stir some reflexion. I would also like to thank everyone whose opinions contributed to these thoughts, and particularly Julia, Marc, Steve and Paul: their input has been invaluable but the mistakes, as they say, are all mine. Brome, 06/14/2020*